

## Use of Medical Care, Police Assistance, and Restraining Orders by Women Reporting Intimate Partner Violence --- Massachusetts, 1996--1997

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Approximately 1.5 million women in the United States are physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner (IP) each year (1). The Woman Abuse Tracking in Clinics and Hospitals (WATCH) Project at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health analyzed data from the 1996 and 1997 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) in Massachusetts to 1) estimate the percentage of women aged 18--59 years experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) who used medical care, police assistance, and restraining orders during the preceding 5 years, 2) determine where women experiencing IPV went for medical care, and 3) examine the overlap in use of these three services. This report describes the results of these analyses, which indicate that a higher percentage of women aged 18--59 years use police assistance rather than obtain a restraining order or seek medical care.

BRFSS is an ongoing, state-based, random-digit-dialed telephone survey of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population aged >18 years. Questions on IPV developed by the WATCH Project were added to the Massachusetts BRFSS in 1996 and 1997. During the 2 years, 2940 women aged 18--59 years responded to the survey (response rate: 64.5%). Of these, 129 (5.5%) were excluded from analysis because they either refused or responded "don't know/not sure" to the initial questions about whether they had ever been physically or sexually hurt, and if so, if this was by an IP\*. Women aged >60 years also were excluded from the analyses because of low levels of reporting recent IPV. Data were aggregated across the 2 years and weighted to reflect the probability of selection and the demographic distribution of the Massachusetts adult population. Estimated proportions and standard errors were calculated using SUDAAN (2).

Survey respondents were asked whether they had ever been physically or sexually hurt† by an IP and when this violence last occurred. Respondents who reported IPV during the preceding 5 years also were asked the following questions about service use: 1) "Did you see a doctor or nurse as a result of being hurt by any of these people in the past five years?"; 2) "In the past five years, were the police called about any of these incidents?"; and 3) "In the past five years, have you gotten a restraining order at a court against a current or ex-(husband/wife), partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, or date?"§ Respondents who reported having seen a doctor or nurse were asked where they sought care most recently, and those who reported police assistance were asked how many times the police had come for incidents of IPV during the preceding 5 years.

Among women aged 18--59 years, 18.0% reported ever having experienced IPV, 6.6% reported IPV during the preceding 5 years, and 2.1% reported IPV during the preceding 12 months (Table 1). Among women reporting IPV during the preceding 5 years, 39.0% received police assistance, 33.8% obtained a restraining order, and 28.7% sought medical care as a result of IPV. Most women who received police assistance also reported obtaining a restraining order: 69.7%¶ of women who received police assistance for IPV also obtained a restraining order against an IP. Among women reporting IPV, 11.1% sought medical care as a result of IPV but did not obtain

police assistance or a restraining order. Approximately half (55.9%) of women reporting IPV received one or more of the three services.

Most women reporting IPV during the preceding 5 years were aged 18--29 years (64.0%), employed (69.8%), had some college education (60.3%), and had children in the household (52.5%). Half (50.1%) of women had never been married, 28.6% were divorced or separated, and 21.3% were married or cohabitating.

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